

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

JAMES EUGENE LUTTRELL,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 1:07-cv-864

v.

Honorable Wendell A. Miles

MARY BERGHUIS et al.,

Defendants.

OPINION

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Plaintiff has paid the \$350.00 filing fee. Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, PUB. L. NO. 104-134, 110 STAT. 1321 (1996), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A; 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must read Plaintiff's *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff's allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, the Court will dismiss Plaintiff's complaint for failure to state a claim.

Discussion

I. Factual allegations

Plaintiff James Eugene Luttrell presently is incarcerated with the Michigan Department of Corrections and housed at the West Shoreline Correctional Facility (MSP). He sues 51st Circuit Court Judge Richard I. Cooper, Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Cris VanOosterum, court-appointed defense attorney Henry J. Dongvillo, and MSP Warden Mary Berghuis.

According to quasi-legalistic ramblings of the complaint, Plaintiff appears to allege that attorneys licensed by the State Bar of Michigan are not, in fact, “licensed” to practice law in Michigan because the State Bar of Michigan is a voluntary association. According to Plaintiff, licensing may only happen in accordance with the British Accredited Registry (BAR) system established in Boston in 1761, which certified BAR attorneys as officers of the court. Attorneys licensed by the State Bar of Michigan, Plaintiff argues, are merely foreign agents as defined under 22 U.S.C. § 611, who have not properly registered under 22 U.S.C. § 612. As a result, Plaintiff contends, his conviction by the practice of un-licensed, non-BAR attorneys, has unlawfully placed him in “servitude,” in violation of his constitutional rights to equal protection and due process of law. For relief, he seeks immediate release from prison and an order vacating all sentences imposed upon him by these non-registered foreign agents.

II. Failure to state a claim

A complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted when it is clear that no relief could be granted under any set of facts that could be proved consistent with the allegations of the complaint. *Jones v. City of Carlisle*, 3 F.3d 945, 947 (6th Cir. 1993). To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal

Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

Although Plaintiff does not invoke 28 U.S.C. § 2254, the Court is unable to construe the allegations of the complaint as anything other than a challenge to his state-court conviction and his current confinement. His complaint explicitly requests “release from custody,” and a vacation of his criminal conviction. (Compl., p.5). A challenge to the fact or duration of confinement should be brought as a petition for habeas corpus and is not the proper subject of a civil rights action brought pursuant to § 1983. *See Preiser v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 475, 484, 493 (1973) (the essence of habeas corpus is an attack by a person in custody upon the legality of that custody and the traditional function of the writ is to secure release from illegal custody). Therefore, to the extent that Plaintiff’s complaint challenges the fact or duration of his incarceration, it must be dismissed. *See Barnes v. Lewis*, No. 93-5698, 1993 WL 515483, at *1 (6th Cir. Dec. 10, 1993) (dismissal is appropriate where § 1983 action seeks equitable relief and challenges fact or duration of confinement); *Moore v. Pemberton*, 110 F.3d 22, 23-24 (7th Cir. 1997) (reasons for not construing a § 1983 action as one seeking habeas relief include (1) potential application of *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477 (1994), (2) differing defendants, (3) differing standards of § 1915(a)(3) and § 2253(c), (4) differing fee requirements, (5) potential application of second or successive petition doctrine or three-strikes rules of § 1915(g)).

To the extent Plaintiff seeks injunctive, declaratory and monetary relief for alleged violations of Constitutional rights, his claim is barred by *Heck*, 512 U.S. 477. In *Heck*, the Supreme Court held that a state prisoner cannot make a cognizable claim under § 1983 for an alleged unconstitutional conviction or for “harm caused by actions whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid” unless a prisoner shows that the conviction or sentence has been “reversed on direct appeal, expunged by executive order, declared invalid by a state tribunal authorized to make such determination, or called into question by a federal court’s issuance of a writ of habeas corpus.” *Id.* at 486-87 (footnote omitted). The holding in *Heck* has been extended to actions seeking injunctive or declaratory relief. See *Edwards v. Balisok*, 520 U.S. 641, 646-48 (1997) (declaratory relief); *Clarke v. Stalder*, 154 F.3d 186, 189-90 (5th Cir. 1998) (claim for injunctive relief intertwined with request for damages); *Wilson v. Kinkela*, No. 97-4035, 1998 WL 246401, at *1 (6th Cir. May 5, 1998) (injunctive relief). Plaintiff’s allegations clearly call into question the validity of his conviction. Therefore, his action is barred under *Heck* until his criminal conviction has been invalidated. Accordingly, Plaintiff’s complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.

Conclusion

Having conducted the review required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Court will dismiss Plaintiff's complaint for failure to state a claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). For the same reasons, the Court find no good-faith basis for appeal within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997).

Dated: November 5, 2007

/s/ Wendell A. Miles

Wendell A. Miles

Senior United States District Judge